

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE  
Bureau of Agricultural Economics

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AGRICULTURAL PLANNING  
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By Bushrod W. Allin,  
Head, Division of State and Local Planning.

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For a good many years the Department of Agriculture and the Land Grant Colleges have been working together to make a better rural life in this country. All that is a long story, well known to all of you. One of the latest chapters in the story deals with this activity known as the "county planning project", or more recently called the "county land-use planning project".

New Administrative Problems Since 1933

Present planning work, like the chapter of any continued story, is an outgrowth of the events that preceded it. Experience thus far with the various agricultural programs started since 1933 has developed three important problems for the Department of Agriculture and the Land Grant Colleges: 1) How to administer a national program so as to accomplish its national objectives and at the same time fit it to the many local variations so that it will serve the needs of each locality; 2) How to coordinate the various Federal, State and local agricultural programs so that they are essentially a single

program when they reach the individual farm; 3) How to clarify the working relationships of the Department of Agriculture and the Land Grant Colleges.

The first of these three problems developed with the passage of the Agricultural Adjustment Act in 1933. It was then recognized that any such program involving acreage quotas might work well as an emergency proposition, but that if such a program took on aspects of permanency, adjustments would have to be made that would fit it to the conditions of each locality. For example, manifestly a national program operating over a long time should not prevent a shift in cotton production from the Georgia Piedmont to the plains of Texas and the irrigated areas of the Southwest if, under normal conditions, natural economic changes were tending to bring about such a shift.

In the belief that the agricultural adjustment program was evolving from an emergency to a long-time basis, the Agricultural Adjustment Administration, in cooperation with the Extension Service, started the present county planning project in the late summer of 1935. This project, as you will recall, followed closely on the heels of the regional adjustment research project, which was a cooperative effort on the part of the Agricultural Adjustment Administration and the Experiment Stations throughout the country to find a basis upon which a program of adjustments might be developed. This latter project had asked the experts what adjustments, by areas, were needed in the interest of conservation, good farming, and good land use. The county planning project asked farmers the same question.



While this problem of making differential adjustments still confronted the Department and the Colleges, the question of coordination of the various programs was rapidly becoming a major issue. This arose from the fact that other programs, such as Submarginal Land Purchase, Crop Insurance, Commodity Loans, Marketing Agreements, Surplus Disposal, Soil Conservation, Farm Security, Farm Forestry, and others, either had just been launched or were being developed. In general, each of these programs is authorized by a separate act of Congress, and they all charge the Secretary of Agriculture with responsibility for efficient administration. Each of them usually deals with only one segment of the complex problem of raising and stabilizing farm income, using wisely our land and water resources, and otherwise promoting a better rural life.

Because of the rapid launching of these programs and in view of the fact that Congress had given only general consideration to their relationship, it was inevitable that cases of conflict, duplication, and ineffectiveness would arise in their administration, particularly when two or more of the programs were applied to the same farm. Regardless of how well conceived these programs might have been, the real test of whether they made sense in relation to one another came when they were applied in the field to specific situations. There have been sufficient instances of the lack of harmony between programs to cause the Secretary to seek means of better coordination. One of his first efforts in this direction led to the establishment of the Office of Land Use Coordination.

Federal funds for assisting the States in carrying on research and Extension work are appropriated, as you know, on a grant-in-aid basis and are administered by the Department of Agriculture under very general rules, permitting a high degree of State autonomy. This was the chief kind of Federal-State relation existing when the Department began its so-called "action" programs in 1933, programs financed not by grants-in-aid but entirely by Federal funds for which the Secretary of Agriculture was made responsible.

It was natural and logical for the Department to rely upon the cooperative Extension organization with its system of county agricultural agents as the field machinery for getting these programs under way in the States. But the Colleges reacted in various ways. Some said they wanted to administer all the programs; others said they wanted nothing to do with them because theirs were purely educational and research institutions. Between these extremes there were all shades of opinion. It was evident that sooner or later this question of relationships between the Colleges and the new agencies of the Department must be clarified. At the annual Land Grant College Association meeting at Houston in the fall of 1937, it was agreed that the Association and the Department would each appoint a committee to study the problem and work out a solution.

In the spring of 1938, the Department committee came to the conclusion that this problem of Federal-State relationships and the other two problems -- that of fitting national programs to local needs, and that of coordinating the national programs -- were simply different aspects of the same broad problem of fitting the work of the Department



and the Colleges more effectively to the needs of agriculture in a changing economic and political environment. It formulated a proposal, therefore, for dealing with all three problems at once. The proposal was that the Department should retain full responsibility for administering its "action" programs and that the Colleges and the Department proceed at once in each State and locality to cooperate in the development of land-use plans which might serve as a basis for localizing and correlating all programs.

#### "Planning" Machinery Under the Mt. Weather Agreement

Both committees met at Mt. Weather, Virginia, on July 8, 1938 to consider this proposal and the outcome of their discussions was a document that had come to be known as the Mt. Weather Agreement. This Agreement includes the main suggestions of the Department committee and a rather detailed description of a proposed organization for planning. Among other things, the suggested organization included a State committee in each State consisting of a representative of each of the action agencies of the Department, the State Director of Extension as chairman of the committee, the State Director of the Experiment Station, representatives of any other State agencies having responsibility for land-use programs, and a number of representative farm men and women. Also, it was proposed that a committee be established in each county, with the county agricultural agent as secretary, and consisting of 10 to 20 farm men and women and any county representatives of agencies included on the State committee, as well as those of any strictly local agencies responsible for programs directly affecting

the others. It was suggested further that community committees made up of representative farm men and women be established to assist the county committees. The suggestions was that this entire organization should address itself first to the task of developing a land-use plan which would lay out precisely the longer term objectives for all agencies operating in each area.

After agreeing that State and local planning needed to be done, that it was a joint responsibility of the Department, Colleges, and local people and that a logical way to begin was to develop land-use plans, the question arose as to what procedure in land-use planning was necessary in order to make the results most useful. It was evident that the work would have to be done in such a manner that results would be comparable on both sides of a State or county boundary.

The Department was urged to prepare a statement embodying its concepts of the type of land-use planning work which should be undertaken. After a number of conferences, the several agencies of the Department agreed upon a proposal that has come to be known as County Land-Use Planning Work Outline No. 1. This proposal was then discussed with Land Grant College representatives in a series of regional Conferences and adopted as a general guide for the first phase of intensive planning work. It is a suggested procedure by which local planning committees can: 1) identify and analyze local land use areas which are essentially homogeneous with respect to physical characteristics, present land use, and problems of adjustment; 2) recommend land use adjustments in each area.



### Department Reorganization to Provide a Planning Agency

After the Department had committed itself at Mt. Weather to cooperate with the Colleges in developing land-use plans and had proposed procedures for doing so, it became evident to the Secretary that the Department itself was not organized to cooperate effectively with the proposed State and local planning organizations. There was no agency in the Department that had responsibility for general planning for the Department as a whole. To correct this weakness, the Secretary reorganized the Department and designated the Bureau of Agricultural Economics as the general planning agency for the Department.

The Bureau itself was reorganized to include among other things a Division of State and Local Planning, with a representative in each State and an Inter-Bureau Coordinating Committee in Washington to advise with the Bureau chief. In addition, an Agricultural Program Board was established to serve as an advisory council to the Secretary. This board consists of the heads of the action agencies, the chief of the Bureau of Agricultural Economics and the Department's directors. The Land Use Coordinator is chairman.

### Beginning Action in the Field of Agricultural Planning

Since the Mt. Weather Agreement was only an agreement between two committees, not binding either the States or agencies, and since the reorganization of the Department came after the Mt. Weather conference, it was considered necessary to formalize the terms of these relationships by two Memoranda of Understanding -- one between the Bureau of Agricultural Economics and each Land Grant College and another between

the Bureau and the various action agencies in the Department. The first of these two memoranda covers the main points in the Mt. Weather agreement, provides for recognition of changes made subsequently in the organization of the Department, and provides that the State representative of the Bureau of Agricultural Economics shall be secretary of the State committee. It also provides that during each year planning work shall be carried forward in at least one county in the State to the point of developing an action program.

This last provision really brings planning into action and refers to what has come to be known recently as the "unified program county". It insures that planning will not become merely pointless discussion, and furthermore that there will be no ground for the fear sometimes expressed by State people that the Department might not pay any attention to the recommendations of State and local committees.

Another provision of the memorandum is that there shall be established at each institution a Land Grant College-BAE committee of three men, consisting of the project leader who is appointed by the Director of Extension, a representative of the Experiment Station, and the State representative of the Bureau of Agricultural Economics. This three-man committee functions not only as advisory to the agencies it represents, but it is also a working committee to assist the State land-use planning committee previously discussed. Under the terms of the Memorandum of Understanding, it has responsibility for developing details of procedure to be followed in the planning work, encouraging related research work and formulating the annual project agreement covering the cooperative work of the three agencies most directly concerned in guiding the planning program.



### Democratic Procedure in Planning

So much for the mechanics and the more recent history. The basic assumption underlying the whole effort is that for the indefinite future Congress will continue to charge the Department of Agriculture with responsibility for large scale action programs. This seems to be the prospect regardless of which political party may be in power.

Besides the basic assumption, there are two secondary ones that rest quite as much on philosophy as on logic. These are: 1) that planning should be developed with widespread farmer participation; 2) that the planning process itself is desirable as a means of bringing about better coordination.

In the light of present day world conditions it behooves all democratic nations to devise ways and means by which the decisions of government can be made with the greatest possible participation by the people most affected. This is the sort of thing we must provide for unflinching if we are to safeguard the democratic ideal. Furthermore, by no means the least of the benefits will be the educational effect. We want widespread farmer participation for its own sake and not merely because of its contribution to the technical refinement of the plan itself.

On the other hand, while recognizing the vital part to be played by farmers, we must recognize that the administrator and technician also have valuable contributions to make in program building.

Wise Programs Are Based on Compromise, Not Coercion

There are two general ways of bringing about better coordination. One of them is the big stick method of command and obedience. The other is based on discussion and mutual agreement or "compromise". It is the philosophy of the Department and the Colleges that the latter process is the really workable one. No one is wise enough to be a dictator. The first objective in this county planning, therefore, is to set up an organization that is recognized as having the responsibility for studying and discussing all public agricultural programs and working out with the administrators of such programs the best methods for their application.

The county agent long ago learned that he could develop a better and more workable program when he listened to the advice and the counsel of representative farmers in his county. Such farmer committees, however, represented broad interests and the only reason they were concerned primarily with the Extension program was because it was virtually the only public agricultural program in the county. The change since 1933 has brought several new public action programs, some having administrative officials in the counties. Until after the Mt. Weather conference no single committee in the county had any recognized advisory relationship to all the programs. Present planning committees are planning not merely for an extension program but for all programs operating in a county.



### The Agricultural Program Grows More Dynamic

Extension workers sometimes feel maligned by current references to these more recent "action" programs. They take this as something of an inference that theirs is a program of inaction. Of course no such meaning is intended. The pertinent questions concerning Extension programs do not turn on the issue of action or inaction but on the kind of action.

There is hesitation in some quarters to embrace programs involving what is usually called a "subsidy". But "subsidy" is a relative term. In the early years of our history a giant agriculture promoted the general welfare by "subsidizing" infant industry; more recently, a giant industry by "subsidizing" a depressed agriculture. For a long time educational institutions and effort were the principal "subsidies" which our farmers were able to get from a business-minded government. But after the depth of depression reached in 1932, the pressure of economic forces moved the Federal government to launch programs that differ from its previous activities in at least two important respects: 1) They undertake on a larger scale to do things that individuals cannot do; 2) They give more direct assistance to the individual as he acts without decreasing the work of teaching him how to act. The outstanding example of a program illustrating the first of these two distinctions is the effort to establish parity income through production control, parity payments, and other measures. An activity illustrating the second distinction is the granting of aids for erosion control on individual farms.

The planning the county agent and his advisory committee did in the days before 1933 will not meet present needs, simply for the reason that there is now public authority to take action along lines that were impossible in those days. What use was it then for a county committee to do the kind of planning that would be helpful in the rehabilitation of low-income farm families? There was no authority to do anything about it if such plans were made. Today, such authority does exist, through programs like those of the Farm Security Administration, and there will be action whether general planning is done or not. While the public is giving funds to a farmer to meet emergency requirements is the logical time to administer those funds so as to make the greatest possible permanent improvement.

#### Active Planning Program Begun

After more than a year of activity following the Mt. Weather conference, memoranda of understanding providing for this type of planning have been negotiated by the Bureau of Agricultural Economics with 45 States. The work has been started on three levels of intensity:

1) preparatory work; 2) intensive land use planning; 3) the development of unified county programs.

Preparatory work consists mainly of organizing committees, discussing with them the general problems and indicating to them that as soon as technical personnel can assist them, they will be asked to initiate for their county the area analysis and land classification work, the first step in the intensive planning suggested in Work Outline



No. 1. The intensive work is being done or will be undertaken this winter in about 800 counties, each county representing a major type-of-farming area within a State. In most States work is under way in at least one county to develop a unified program for operation in 1940 or as soon thereafter as possible. This is the most intensive form of the planning work. It is hoped that all counties eventually will become unified program counties. Already some of these have made recommendations that are being seriously considered by the agencies affected and are quite likely to be adopted.

#### Planning a Continuous Process

No unified program is ever finished. It is not a blue-print that is made in a few weeks, adopted or rejected and then forgotten. It is a growing thing, possibly subject to modification. It is both like and unlike what Extension "has always done". It is just as unlike pre-1933 planning as present programs are unlike pre-1933 programs. The differences are larger, too. In the first place, it seeks to meet different needs and secondly, it requires the participation of broader and more varied interests. The county planning leader of the future will need to be something of a statesman, diplomat, politician, philosopher, scientist, economist, and farmer, all wrapped in one.

None of the planning committees has any administrative authority. Each is wholly advisory and its success requires mutual confidence and respect on the part of cooperating agencies. It is a cooperative enterprise that is destined to fall short wherever effective agencies are excluded from it, or wherever any one agency succeeds in dominating.

The term "land-use" has been given prominence in our recent activities because it was the land-use implications of the various programs of the Department that did most to reveal the need for better coordination of programs. The Department and the Colleges believe that an analysis of land-use problems is the best place to begin, but they are interested in planning land use only as it serves as a sound foundation and a good point of departure for more comprehensive planning. We have no desire to restrict any committee's interest in planning to some field of "land-use" arbitrarily defined. In planning for land use, moreover, there is no intention to ignore people or the "human" side of the problem. By "land-use" we mean, of course, the use of land by people.

Nor is the Department interested in the kind of planning that will serve only to coordinate its own programs with one another. It is equally concerned to correlate its programs with State and local programs and with those of other departments of the Federal government. That is neither to promise that it will adopt every local recommendation any more than to say it takes to itself the whole function of national planning. One of the purposes of the planning procedure here described will have been served when the agencies of the Department provide local committees with thorough and understandable explanations of why their suggestions will or will not be adopted. This exchange of ideas fosters the understanding that is essential to agreement.



With respect to other Federal departments and the State planning boards, it is the policy of the Department to promote the closest possible cooperation. Agricultural planning is closely interrelated with industrial, urban and other major fields of interest. In the case of issues that can be resolved only through collaboration with planners in these other fields, the National Resources Committee and the State planning boards are expected to provide the necessary organization. Meanwhile, agriculture has its own job to do, and the Department of Agriculture and the Land Grant Colleges are the logical public agencies for helping the farmer do it.

Planning is inescapable. It is not something we can just do or not do. The particular methods by which we do it, of course, are always subject to change, and I know of no one who is so sure of all the details of present procedure that he would be willing to predict that they will not be changed. Experience will dictate modifications, but plan we must!

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